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TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD
Ad Hoc Working Group on Trade Efficiency
First session
Geneva, 16 November 1992
Agenda item 3

PROGRAMME OF WORK OF THE AD HOC WORKING GROUP ON TRADE EFFICIENCY*

1. Pursuant to a New Partnership for Development: the Cartagena Commitment, adopted at the eighth session of the Conference, the Ad Hoc Working Group agreed, on the basis of Board decision 398 (XXXVIII) which sets out in annex C the terms of reference of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Trade Efficiency, the following work programme.

2. With the aim of fostering greater participation in international trade, in particular by small and medium-sized enterprises, giving special attention to countries and regions less advanced in the area of trade efficiency, the Working Group will work in the following six main areas:

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*Adopted by the Ad Hoc Working Group on Trade Efficiency, at its 2nd (closing) plenary meeting, on 20 November 1992.

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A. Information flows to build trade efficiency

In this area, the Working Group will:

(a) Identify the type of information available and further information needed, including the sources and means of access to such information, to make countries more trade efficient;

(b) Consider ways to enable countries and enterprises to access, use, maintain and update the information they need in the most cost-efficient fashion, including methods to identify better local users' needs;

(c) Explore ways to foster transparency in trade-related information flows, giving due consideration to confidentiality requirements as well as attempting to identify areas of agreement;

(d) Consider ways to promote the involvement of new users, especially small- and medium-sized enterprises, in information networks, and the use of regional information systems.

B. Facilitating trade

In this area, the Working Group will:

(a) Identify and promote ways to rationalize trade procedures and simplify and standardize information requirements. The work of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) WP4 and other relevant bodies will be taken into account. Possibilities of reducing transaction costs should be identified;

(b) Study the problems linked to the need for adequate information and telecommunication infrastructure as a necessary condition for trade efficiency, including open access, installation, operation and training in order to build local capacity;

(c) Cooperate with UNECE WP4 to promote greater awareness, understanding and use of Electronic Data Interchange (EDI), including the standards established through WP4 and the business practices necessary for the use of EDI, with special emphasis on small and medium-sized enterprises and, more generally, new players in international trade.

C. Working towards trade efficiency: the role of Governments

In this area, the Working Group will:

(a) Study ways in which the legal, regulatory and administrative environment can be improved so as to allow greater national efficiency including a recommendation for model laws to support greater participation in global commerce using electronic techniques;

(b) Examine how the interface between the government and the private sector, on the one hand, and the regulatory aspects of sectoral linkages (e.g. banks or transport), on the other hand, can best satisfy the requirements of trade efficiency.

D. Trade Points

UNCTAD will provide assistance to the member countries in implementing a pilot "Trade Point" programme which shall be based on the use of international standards designed with a view towards open systems necessary for their interconnection. The Trade Points will ensure equal opportunity of access for interested trade partners. Such assistance will include:

(a) Establishment and operation of pilot Trade Points

(i) Identification of pilot Trade Points;

(ii) Identification of the elements needed for international/regional cooperation between national Trade Points;

(iii) Assistance to each pilot Trade Point so as to determine:

- functional options
- technical requirements
- funding requirements
- training requirements;

(b) Evaluation

(i) Evaluate the pilot Trade Points and their effectiveness and efficiency in terms of:

- creating awareness of the potential benefits
- overcoming obstacles to their effectiveness and efficiency
- meeting the needs of users, especially small and medium-sized enterprises
- cost-effectiveness and efficiency
- involving supporting sectors such as banking, transport, telecommunications, insurance and customs
- building cooperation and linkages at the regional and international levels
- meeting the training requirements of the Trade Point operators and users

(ii) Evaluate efficiency in the use of UNCTAD assistance.

(c) Recommendations

Develop recommendations for future Trade Point programme functionality, set-up, operations, training and funding.

E. Technical assistance

(a) Capacity-building with special emphasis on training and infrastructure including in cooperation with WP4, the development of educational materials on trade facilitation and EDI; assistance in the training of national trade-facilitation and EDI experts; assistance in the establishment of national trade-facilitation organizations; and expert advice in dealing with specific facilitation in relation to EDI implementation problems;

(b) Consideration of suitable means whereby regional institutions actively engaged in trade information activities can assist in implementing the work programme within the regions;

(c) Development of suitable training programmes for technical assistance;

(d) Facilitation of workshops and the 1994 Symposium.

F. 1994 Symposium

The Working Group in consultation with the Secretary-General of UNCTAD shall prepare the 1994 United Nations international symposium on trade efficiency, as called for in paragraphs 157 and 158 of the Cartagena Commitment. For use at that time, the Working Group may undertake research, prepare publications, explanatory or educational materials, including those that emphasize legal or other foci.

The Ad Hoc Working Group on Trade Efficiency requests the Chairman to undertake with members of UNCTAD, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD and relevant organizations, consultations on the date and venue of the 1994 United Nations international symposium on trade efficiency and to report the outcome to the second session of the Ad Hoc Working Group.

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Resources and working methods

The Secretary-General of UNCTAD is invited:

(a) to carry out an assessment of the workload and the financial implications of each activity included in the work programme with a view to formulating proposals to identify the need for additional funding and to encourage voluntary extra-budgetary contributions and make every effort to provide details of the results of the assessment to Member States, in conformity with United Nations procedures, in advance of the meetings of the Working Party on the Medium-term Plan and the Programme Budget, in March 1993;

(b) to establish a core advisory group of experts constituted according to the procedure for electing the Bureau of the Ad Hoc Working Group. This group will meet periodically with the secretariat to advise and assist in carrying out the work programme in accordance with the decisions of the Ad Hoc Working Group. In addition the Secretary-General will request from member States recommendations to develop a roster of experts. These additional experts will be invited to participate, as appropriate, in the meetings of the core advisory group of experts depending upon the subject under discussion.

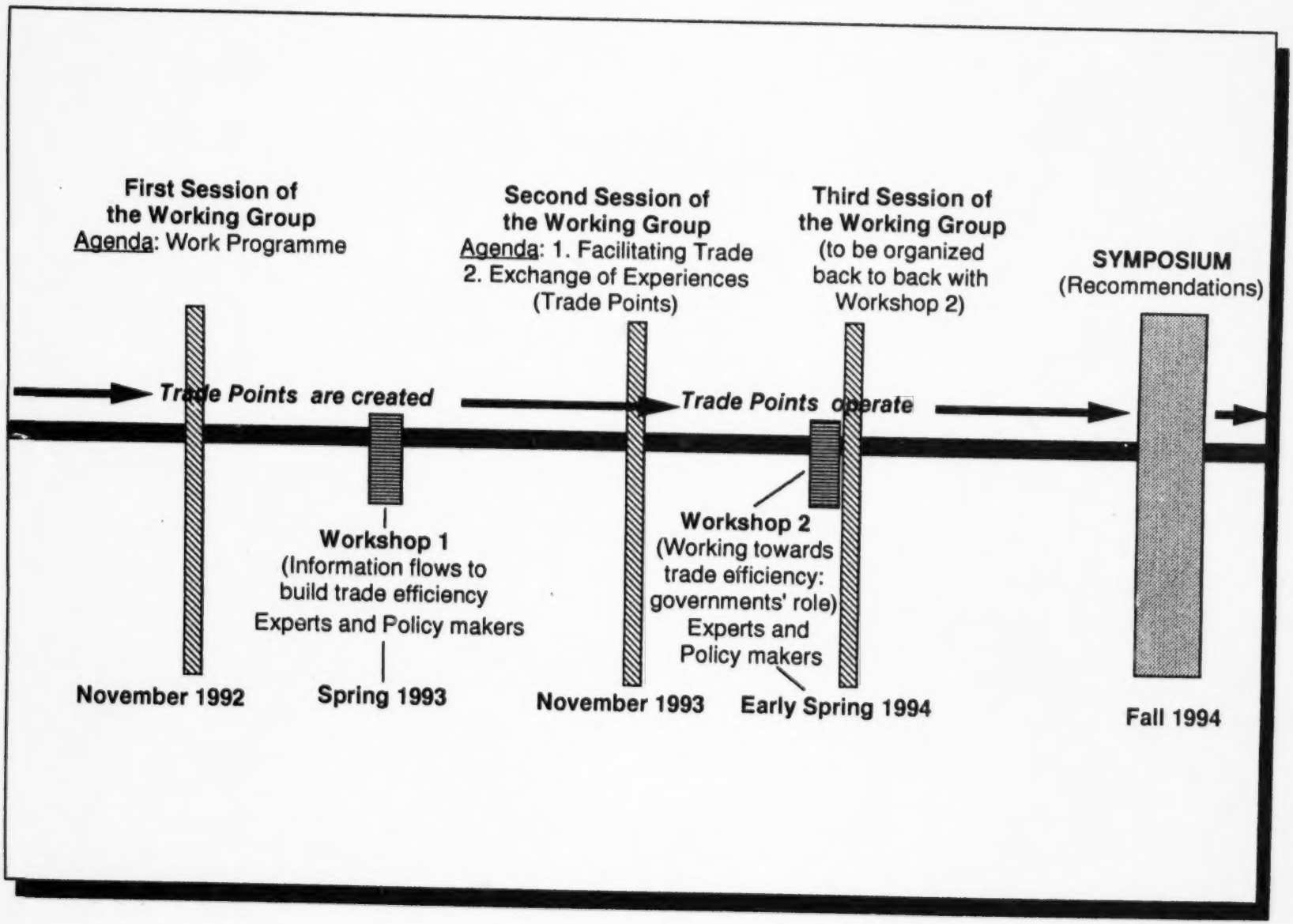
Practical organization

1. It is proposed that element A above (Information flows to build trade efficiency) be the subject of a workshop in the course of Spring 1993, and that element C (Working towards trade efficiency: the role of Governments) be the subject of a workshop in early 1994.

2. Element B (Facilitating trade) would be the first item on the agenda of the second session of the Ad Hoc Working Group, to be held in November 1993; the second item on that agenda would consist of a first assessment of the work done at the Trade Point.

3. It is understood that all elements of this work (meetings of the Ad Hoc Working Group, workshops and work at the Trade Points) would converge on the formulation of recommendations for the 1994 Symposium.

This timetable is summarized in the following diagramme.


First Session of
the Working Group
Agenda: Work Programme
Second Session of
the Working Group
Agenda: 1. Facilitating Trade
2. Exchange of Experiences
(Trade Points)
Third Session of
the Working Group
(to be organized
back to back with
Workshop 2)
SYMPOSIUM
(Recommendations)
Trade Points are created
Trade Points operate
Workshop 1
(Information flows to
build trade efficiency
Experts and Policy makers
Workshop 2
(Working towards
trade efficiency:
governments' role)
Experts and
Policy makers
November 1992
Spring 1993
November 1993
Early Spring 1994
Fall 1994